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## Euthanasia

The ethics surrounding the practice of euthanasia is one of the most hotly debated topics in the medical field as well as the legal domain. Euthanasia is a Greek word meaning good death. In the health field, it is also known as the mercy killing (Math and Chaturvedi). The practice encompasses various dimensions and has both passive and active forms. The former approach involves withholding support and treatment to cause death and the in the latter, the patient is given something lethal to cause death. In many societies, there have been instances where a certain medical or injury causes severe complications in the body inducing a lot of suffering with no hope for a cure. In the midst of such anguish, many patients have opted for death because they understand that nothing else can remedy the situation. The request for a premature death has brought up the debate concerning the role of such practices in the medical field.

The medical field has seen significant development in the last five centuries due to advances in technology, which has introduced several fields such as genetics and bioengineering. Some years ago, smallpox was known to be a killer disease; however, thanks to the advancement in medicine, it is nearly non-existent now. Going back several centuries, one can witness the devastating effect of the bubonic plague, which wiped out a significant population of Europe then. Despite the continuous improvements in the health domain, there are still illnesses and injuries that have no cure. Some of them cause immense suffering to the point that physicians have found

death to be the only peaceful solution. It is true that euthanasia, which is mostly requested by patients, is, indeed, a mercy killing. Putting oneself in the shoes of someone greatly suffering from an incurable disease that will eventually lead to death can help reflect the ethical side of euthanasia. In several countries around the world, the practice is allowed. Such include Belgium, Switzerland, Colombia, Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Even in the United States, states like Oregon, Vermont, Montana, and California have accepted the practice in the form of assisted suicide (Lewis).

There are several arguments that support euthanasia. The first is the rights-based argument. All the advocates of the practice agree with everyone that a person has the right to live. However, a person also has the right to determine how their life ends; it is based on the idea of self-determination and the principles of autonomy (Ebrahimi). Autonomy gives patients the ability to make all decisions about their lives as long as they do not cause harm to others. How their lives end is part of the decision process. Some activists have argued that as much as a human being has the right to live with dignity, he/she also has the right to preserve dignity during death. Second, many supporters of the practice have argued that relieving a patient from extreme pain through euthanasia does more good than harm. According to the core values of our communities, no one should live a life of unbearable pain, therefore, mercy killing should be permissible on the patient's request. It brings up the question of why people live and work so hard in their lives. The answer to that is so that they can enjoy our time here on earth no matter how short it will be. A terminally ill patient does not experience the same joy of life. His/her life is hell on earth, and there is nothing modern medicine can do about it. The patient is bound to suffer till until death. The final argument for euthanasia rests on the difference between active and passive euthanasia. Most people who fight active euthanasia are supporters of passive euthanasia. They believe that withholding treatment for a patient suffering from an incurable disease is letting them die a natural death

(Ebrahimi). If it is ethical to let nature take its course, why should it be slow and painful? Active euthanasia in such a case is the more humane option according to most physicians supporting it. If death is the only solution, it is better to make it less painful by use of lethal injection instead of watching a person whom people care about being tormented to death in the name of letting nature do its work.

A significant group of people in society see euthanasia as immoral. One of their major arguments is the sanctity of life (Nunes). In both religious and secular stands, life must be respected. Christians see life as a gift from God as they were made in the likeness of God (Narbekovas and Meilius). It is not a human's decision to end it; only God has that ability. Therefore, they allow for passive euthanasia despite the suffering it brings. It is seen as letting the hand of God (nature) run its course with no interruption. Another reason why euthanasia is unethical is because it is still murder: the act of ending a human life. Even if the procedure is done at the patient's request, it will be considered as murder. Another point is autonomy; an argument that is also used by advocates of euthanasia. According to Kant and Mill, autonomy forbids any actions that negatively affect the conditions necessary for autonomy (Ebrahimi). There have also been arguments that state that most terminal ill patients are not of sound mind, so, they cannot voluntarily request for euthanasia. The idea also brings up the issue of vulnerability. If euthanasia is allowed, some people could take advantage of vulnerable patients and end their lives. Finally, those fighting euthanasia believe that there is no need to take a human life when palliative care is still available.

The argument against euthanasia is well-founded. Some of the strong points include palliative care, vulnerability, and autonomy. However, there are things that the supporters of the procedure can never agree with. First, is the claim of letting nature take its course. It is important

to realize that human beings are at the top of the food chain because of intelligence. When have humans ever let nature take its course? They have the ability to understand what is right and what is wrong and that that sits in the grey region. Only animals let nature take its course. The term human is associated with the idea of being humane. There is no humanity in letting someone suffer till death when it has already been established that it is the final play.

It can be concluded that euthanasia is a hotly debated topic with most arguments revolving around physician-assisted suicide and active voluntary euthanasia. In some countries, it is illegal while others have been enlightened and accept the procedure. There has been an increase in states that have started adopting the practice; such include Oregon and California among others. The future could hold an interesting way to incorporate euthanasia into the medical world.

## Bibliography

Ebrahimi, Nargus. "The Ethics of Euthanasia." *Australian Medical Student Journal*, 24 May. 2012, <http://www.amsj.org/archives/2066>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

Nargus Ebrahimi explores the issue of euthanasia and provides relevant information regarding its debate. Some of the aspects that he discusses include the definition, arguments against, and arguments for euthanasia.

Lewis, Penney. "Assisted dying: What does the law in different countries say?" *BBC News*, 6 Oct. 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-34445715>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

In the BBC report, Lewis takes a look at the issue of euthanasia and highlights its by region indicating all the states that either support or reject it. She also identifies various forms of euthanasia depending on region.

Math, Suresh and Santosh Chaturvedi. "Euthanasia: Right to life vs Right to Die." *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, Dec. 2012, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3612319/>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

Explores euthanasia through definitions and origins. The author also explores the issue as understood in various regions around the world.

Narbekovas and Meilius. "Why Is the Ethics of Euthanasia Wrong?" *NCBI*, 2004, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16294446>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

Narbekovas and Meilius explore euthanasia and discuss some of the reasons why the practice is unethical. Covers the subject from both religious, societal, and scientific standpoints

Nunes, Rui. "Euthanasia: A Challenge to Medical Ethics." *Journal of Clinical Research & Bioethics*, 20 Aug. 2016, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/euthanasia-a-challenge-to-medical-ethics-2155-9627-1000282.php?aid=78320>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

Explores the issue of euthanasia in modern medicine and also discusses its roots and perception throughout history. The author also goes deeper into the issue of human rights and the free will of decision-making

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